

The “problem of evil” as considered in the wisdom tradition

Martin Euser, Februari, 2024

Introduction

Many theologians and philosophers have been wrestling with the “problem of evil”. In this short note, I will argue that no such problem exists when one drops the notion of an all-knowing, all-powerful God. Indeed, in the cosmogony and ontology I adhere to, there cannot be such a God.

The root of the problem: an anthropomorphic God

When one adheres to the idea of a Personal God, one runs into contradictions. That is to say, when one thinks that such a God is all-powerful, purely Good, and all-knowing, then one has to explain why such a God tolerates the existence of evil. The problem is even greater than that: what exactly is a Personal God? It seems that this kind of God is suspiciously modeled after human fantasy and expectations. This representation of a God in our minds would necessarily be limited. What Form would such a God have? What kind of substance/energy? This looks to me far too limited a view to be acceptable to the critical thinker.

The alternative: an impersonal Consciousness-Energy-field

So, what is an alternative to an anthropomorphic God or Godhead? Several wisdom-traditions/philosophies¹ propose something more abstract: a kind of ever-moving Energetic Source of cyclic processes of manifestation and reabsorption into the Source. This is something beyond human comprehension.

Note that this doesn't exclude the existence of “Gods”. Only, in this

¹ In archive.org I have uploaded writings from Boehme, Proclus (Plato), Bain (Kabbalah), Vitvan (New Gnosis), and my own work on Point-Loma theosophy (De Purucker) to give some examples of wisdom-traditions. Recently I added the important study of G.R.S. Mead (“Orpheus”) and of J.M. Pryse (“Apocalypse Unsealed” under the title “Armageddon – its real meaning”) to this archive.

perspective, such Gods have limitations (but evolve too). Indeed, the notion of Logos and Demiurge come into play here. The unbounded manifests by the process of limitation in emanation (waves in the ocean might be a simile). Many Logoi arise or exist precisely by reason of limitation. All possible kinds of characteristics are emanated from/arise within the Source. So, loving gods do exist within the wisdom tradition, and these evolve too, to loftier heights and so on. Process-philosophical notions such as evolution are inherent to this view.

Free will and agency *Holonic structure of the universe*

In the model just sketched, beings have their own characteristics and a modicum of free agency. Furthermore, (most) beings are to some degree **complex**: they are actually *holons*, consisting of several layers or structures. The human being is a great example of this, as I have illustrated in appendix A of this book. The holonic structure allows for degrees of freedom. Failure to understand this leads to authors such as Sapolski to declare that humans have no free will. This is a complex issue, because one has to ask: what do you mean by “free will”? I propose to reframe this issue to firstly ask: do humans have agency? The answer is obviously: yes. Is there a degree of freedom in this agency? Can we choose which action to perform or not? Again, the answer is: yes. The problem in denying this becomes really great when considering morality. If we have no choice over our actions, then this issue of morality vaporizes into nothing.

The issue of freedom just lies in the **holonic structure of life**. Study the monadic model of De Purucker in appendix A of this book. It shows that humans have a permanent connection to the Logos of our respective world. To bring this connection to consciousness is the task of spiritual evolution, the unfolding of our latent capabilities. Compare this with “point Omega” of Teilhard de Chardin and the philosophy of Henri Bergson.

Consciousness/attention can **focus** on personal preferences **or** on impersonal deliberations on the greater good of society. There's a delicate balance here! What I am saying here, is that there are *meta*-levels of consciousness that enable the human being to refrain from personal gain in the light of the well-being of society. When one is not aware of the holonic structure of Being, one can easily come to the conclusion that action is wholly biologically

determined. This latter vision is of course rejected by the wisdom-traditions. Appendix A deserves close study, because it throws much light on the holonic structure of the human being. It shows how the personal self participates in a larger stream of consciousness, of which it is itself hardly ever conscious.

Evil as collision of wills

Since humans and other beings have agency in my concept and experience of life, there naturally arises a problem: what if two persons have different ideas and interests? Wouldn't they clash at some point in time and space?

Yes, they would. This can be described as a collision of wills. Usually, one speaks of "evil" when one thinks of some awful actions that harm other people, or other beings. In my view, this kind of evil is unavoidable in the world we currently inhabit.

Evil as deviance from natural order processes

Humans have self-consciousness. (There has been some feedback loop developed in the holonic structure of the human being that enables this².) Now, while evil as a clash between beings can be seen all along in nature, self-consciousness *enables a very deliberate form of evil*. Examples all abound in human history. From misuse of habitual thinking (repeated advertisements for all kinds of luxury goods) to promote a consumer culture, to using fear as a weapon to force people into blind obedience to authorities. Psychical crazes abound today. Framing countries as enemies and war mongering is another example. The myth of progress is another one. The list is endless.

One way of looking upon this issue is to consider the order in natural processes and the violation of this order. I suppose that hardly anyone would disagree that mass slaughter of human beings can be considered as evil. Of course, the whole context of such slaughter should be considered and all the parties involved. Now, who is the culprit?

2 See chapter 7, axiom 3 in [my book](#). Also see the monadic model in appendix A of the book.

The point is that humans have but little evolved in morality and ethical consciousness. There is still a long way to go for homo sapiens and it is far from certain that the species will succeed in attuning to the spiritual in itself and in nature and start acting according to the inherent patterns of order in nature. The wisdom traditions/philosophies have much to offer in this regard as has eco-philosophy (which is but a small subset of the wisdom tradition, but more elaborated as to aspects of the human relation to the environment and social-political consequences). In the first part of this book, I have already referred to Vitvan who reframed wisdom teachings into a more scientific version. He founded the School of the Natural Order. Other giants, such as De Purucker, also have included process notions, such as evolution, into their presentation of wisdom teachings. Evolution is meant here in a **triple** sense: physical, mental and spiritual as I have explained in previous chapters of my book.